

Trump Is Firing Federal Workers Over Beliefs He Doesn't Like

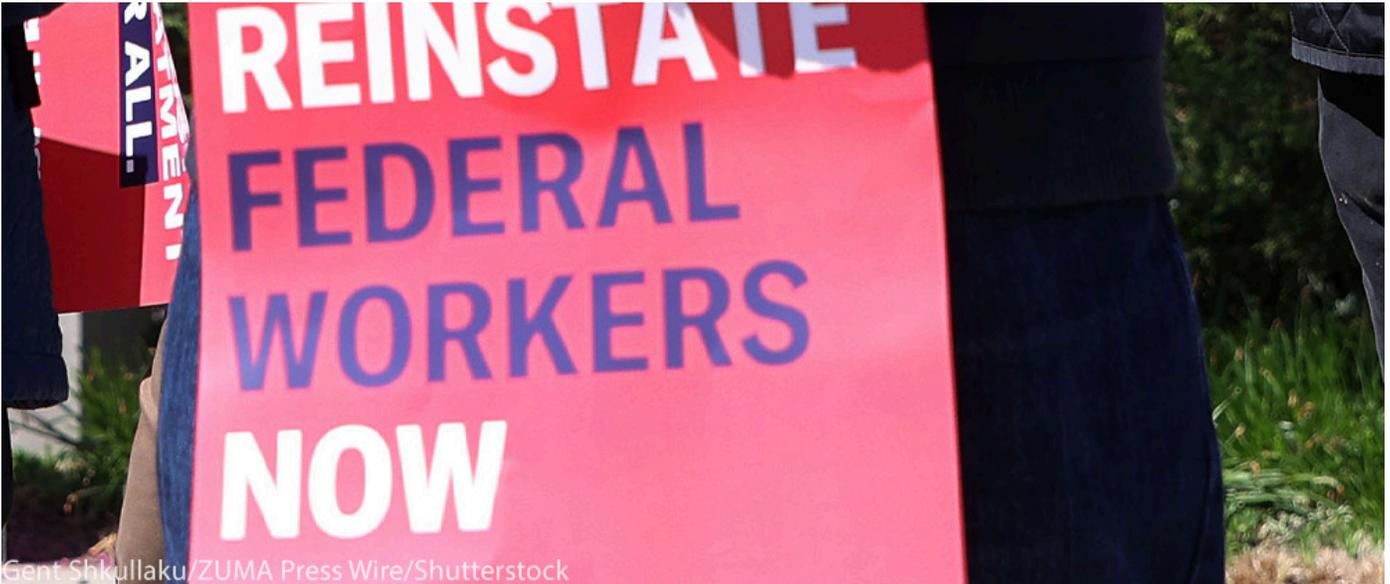
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Scott Michelman

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Punishing dedicated civil servants associated with diversity, equity, and inclusion is unconstitutional retaliation and harms the American people

Mahri Stáinnak remembers the day they got the phone call that would change everything. Stáinnak was eating dinner with their family when a human resources representative called to tell Stáinnak that they were being put on administrative leave after more than 16 years of successful service in the federal government.

In those years of service, Stáinnak helped dozens of cities across the country prevent millions of gallons of raw sewage from overflowing into our lakes and rivers. Stáinnak also managed a team that helped veterans, disabled people, and recent graduates learn about federal government jobs.

Stáinnak didn't need to wonder why they were being put on leave. The caller said it plainly: it was because of their work on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). This answer confused Stáinnak even more because, at the time, they were working at the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) in a position unrelated to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Stáinnak realized that they were being targeted by the Trump administration for work they had once done. That felt shocking—and wrong.

Many other federal employees got similar notices. Roni Chambers got her notice after 20 years of dedicated service at the Federal Aviation Administration. Stefanie Anderson was put on administrative leave from the Centers for Disease Control after responding effectively to public health emergencies for more than a decade.

On March 26, alongside our legal partners, the ACLU of D.C. filed a [class-action complaint](#) against the Trump administration for unlawfully targeting federal employees like Stáinnak, Chambers, and Anderson for their participation in diversity, equity, and inclusion activities. We're asking the [Merit](#)

[System Protections Board](#), which exists to protect federal employees from unlawful employment actions, to reinstate all unconstitutionally punished employees and to make them whole for the wages they have lost and other damages they have experienced.

Before the second Trump administration, these employees were simply doing their jobs. Some helped federal employees get the equipment they needed to do their jobs. Others were working to make sure everyone got a fair shot to receive government benefits and services, that government jobs went to people based on merit, and that applicants and employees were not discriminated against.

But in January 2025, President Donald Trump issued executive orders [14151](#) and [14173](#), which instructed [OPM](#) to terminate all government activities related to DEI and mandated that federal agencies compile lists of the government's related programs and activities in existence as of November 4, 2024. Since Trump issued these orders, his administration has unlawfully targeted any federal employees with any connection to this idea.

As [our complaint](#) details, at the time many of these employees were fired or placed on leave, they were no longer in positions that performed DEI work. Some employees had never held such positions, but [had only participated in related training or presentations](#).

The second Trump administration has made it clear that these punishments are not about employees' roles or positions. The administration does not care if these employees were helping people get services, or ensuring that policies are legal, or even if the employees are no longer involved in DEI at all. Instead of identifying positions to eliminate, the Trump administration targeted people they thought held beliefs that clash with the president's extremist agenda.

These actions show the administration's true motive: to punish people for what the administration perceives as their political views. This kind of retaliation is a violation of federal employees' fundamental First Amendment rights.

The Trump administration fired or punished experienced professionals who excelled at providing critical services, including in public health and safety. In practice, this targeting has had [an outsized impact](#) on federal employees who are women, non-binary, and people of color. This is employment discrimination, in violation of [Title VII of the Civil Rights Act](#). Accordingly, we asserted Title VII claims in our class-action complaint and are pursuing it in tandem with numerous charges of employment discrimination filed with federal Equal Employment Opportunity offices.

Our clients were targeted not because they did anything wrong, but because President Trump did not like a belief he associated with them. This harms both the dedicated public servants who have been targeted, and the American people who have benefited from their expertise and diligence.

The fight to protect federal employees has just begun. We will keep fighting to get these dedicated public servants back to work for the American people. And we'll keep fighting to defend all our civil rights and liberties from authoritarian attacks.

Stay informed

Sign up to be the first to hear about how to take action.

By completing this form, I agree to receive occasional emails per the terms of the ACLU's [privacy statement](#).

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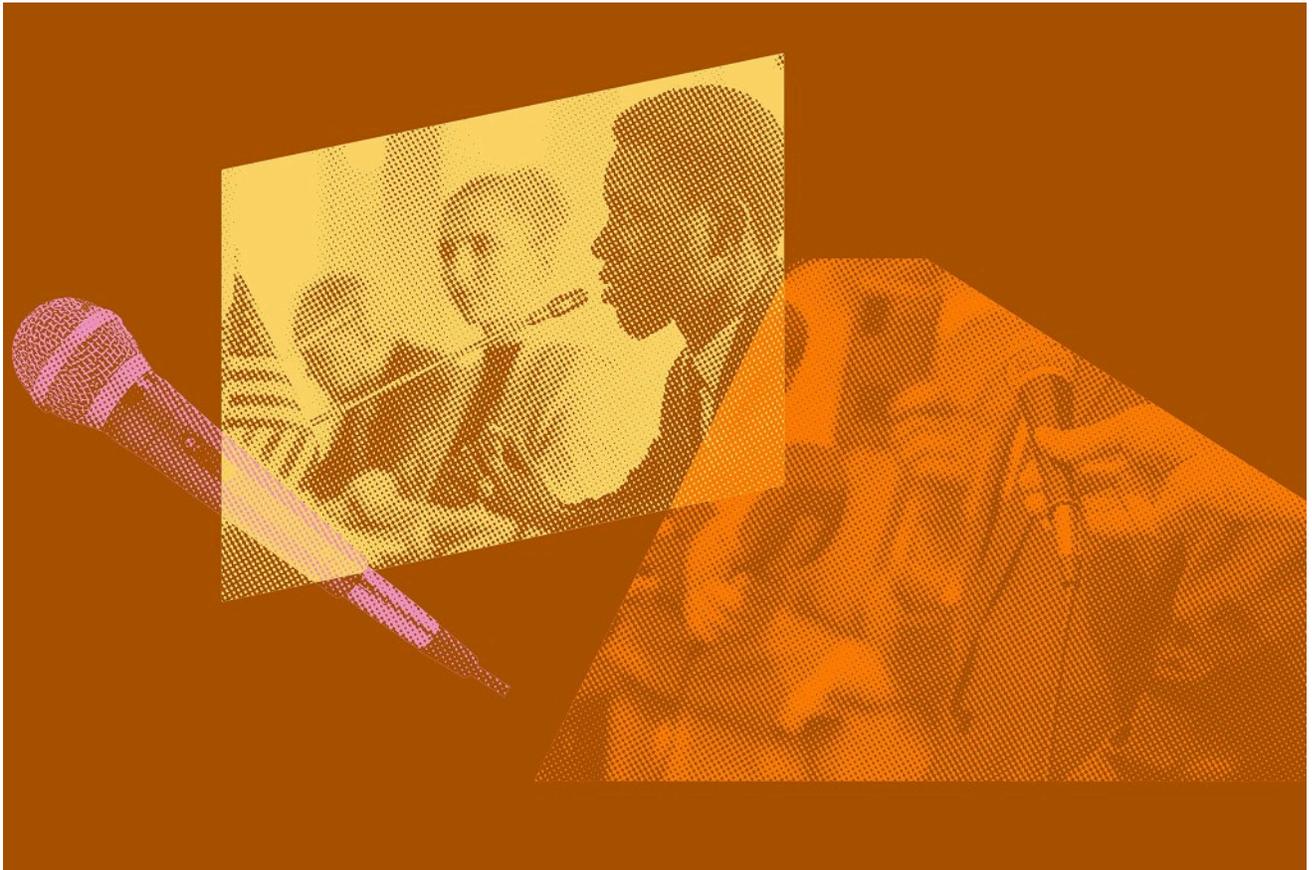
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[Free Speech](#)

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Free Speech

Privacy & Technology

ACLU Moves to Quash Abusive Subpoena Aimed at Tracking Down Man Who Criticized Department of Homeland Security

SAN FRANCISCO – A Philadelphia-area man, identified in court filings as Jon Doe, is challenging an administrative subpoena issued to Google seeking information about his identity and home address after he sent an email to a Department of Homeland Security official criticizing their treatment of a man seeking asylum from Afghanistan. After reading an article in the Washington Post detailing misleading arguments made by the DHS attorney attempting to deport the asylum-seeker to Afghanistan, Doe sent a short email to the attorney at his publicly available DHS email address. The email

urged DHS to “apply principles of common sense and decency” in its treatment of the asylum seeker. Just four hours after Doe sent the email, DHS issued an administrative subpoena to Google seeking a variety of information about Doe and his Gmail account. Google alerted Doe to the subpoena and has not yet fulfilled it. About two weeks after he was notified about the subpoena, two DHS agents and a local police officer showed up to his home to interrogate him about the email. “As a longtime advocate for the rights and dignity of refugees and asylum seekers, the story I read in the Washington Post saddened and alarmed me,” said Jon Doe. “In a democracy, contacting your government about things you feel strongly about is a fundamental right. I exercised that right to urge my government to take this man’s life seriously. For that, I am being investigated, intimidated, and targeted. I hope that by standing up for my rights and sharing my story, others will know what to do when these abusive subpoenas and investigations come knocking on their door.” Yesterday, Doe filed a motion to quash the subpoena, arguing that it violates both federal law and the First Amendment because it impermissibly targets him for his constitutionally protected speech. “These types of abusive subpoenas are designed to intimidate and sow fear of government retaliation,” Stephen A. Loney, ACLU-PA senior supervising attorney. “If you can’t criticize a government official without the worry of having your private records gathered and agents knocking on your door, then your First Amendment rights start to feel less guaranteed. They want to bully companies into handing over our data and to chill users’ speech. This is unacceptable in a democratic society.” Administrative subpoenas like the one sent to Google about Doe are not self-enforcing, not signed by a judge, and require a court order to make them actionable. They are often issued to companies silently, without the person they target knowing about them unless notified by the company. DHS has used them previously to try to unmask anonymous social media users who posted about ICE raids and has also used them to try to pressure Columbia University into sharing information about a student who had participated in pro-Palestinian protests. After the ACLU of Northern California and ACLU of Pennsylvania filed motions challenging some of these subpoenas issued to gather information about Instagram, and Facebook users, DHS withdrew the subpoenas. “If tech companies and other private actors are expected to hand over information about users just because of their political beliefs, there’s no telling when the requests would stop,” said Jennifer Granick, surveillance and cybersecurity counsel with the ACLU’s Speech, Privacy, and Technology Project. “Companies like Google know a lot about our lives, and we should feel confident that the government can’t get their hands on that information on a whim; it would damage the trust of users who allow them to collect sensitive information about their lives and preferences, and it would chill political expression across the board. These abusive subpoenas seek to punish individuals for their speech, but that is prohibited by the First Amendment.” The motion to quash the subpoena was filed in the U.S. District

Court for the Northern District of California by the American Civil Liberties Union, the ACLU of Northern California, and the ACLU of Pennsylvania. The motion can be viewed [here](#).

Court Case: Doe v. DHS

Affiliates: Pennsylvania, Northern California

[Aclu Moves To Quash Abusive Subpoena Aimed At Tracking Down Man Who Criticized Department Of Homeland Security. Explore Press Release.](#)

- California
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Free Speech

Privacy & Technology

Doe v. DHS

On February 2, 2026, the ACLU, ACLU of Northern California, and the ACLU of Pennsylvania filed a motion in federal court to quash a Department of Homeland Security (“DHS”) administrative subpoena seeking Google subscriber records about our client, solely because he engaged in constitutionally protected speech criticizing DHS conduct.

Status: Ongoing

[Doe V. Dhs. Explore Case.](#)

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Free Speech

Cómo una ley de la época de COVID que prohíbe las "noticias falsas" en Puerto Rico acecha a la prensa

Dos periodistas desafían una ley que amenaza la libertad de prensa en un intento de prohibir la desinformación

By: Sam LaFrance

[Cómo Una Ley De La época De Covid Que Prohíbe Las "noticias Falsas" En Puerto Rico Acecha A La Prensa. Explore News & Commentary.](#)

- Press Release

Jan 2026



LGBTQ Rights

Free Speech

ACLU and ACLU of Minnesota React to the Trump Administration's Arrests of Journalists Don Lemon and Georgia Fort

WASHINGTON — Last night, the Trump administration arrested journalists Don Lemon and Georgia Fort for reporting on federal agent activity and protests in Minneapolis. Their arrests and overnight detentions came after a federal magistrate judge declined to issue arrest warrants for them, and after Minnesota's chief federal district judge expressed strong skepticism about the charges' validity. These arrests are the latest in a series of attacks by the Trump Administration on the First Amendment's guarantee of a free press. In recent months, the Trump administration has retaliated against journalists and bystanders for recording immigration enforcement activity, conducted a search of a Washington Post journalist's home after

reporting confidential information, punished the Associated Press for refusing to use the Administration's preferred term for the Gulf of Mexico, and tried to prevent journalists from reporting on non-official information from the Pentagon. Esha Bhandari, Director of the ACLU Speech, Privacy, and Technology Project, issued the following statement in response: "The federal government prosecuting journalists for their reporting is extremely concerning, made more so by its continued pursuit of these charges after a magistrate judge refused to sign-off on the arrest warrant and over the reported objections of career prosecutors. This will send a chilling message to other journalists reporting on the administration's actions, and should be understood in the context of the government's broader crackdown on freedom of the press." Deepinder Mayell, Executive Director of the ACLU of Minnesota, issued the following statement: "The Trump administration has abused the rights of Minnesotans for months. Arresting journalists should alarm everyone. These arrests are a bold escalation of the Trump administration's quest to target a free press, avoid transparency and shape the truth. They are trying to send a message to journalists across the country that they could be next."

Affiliate: Minnesota

[Aclu And Aclu Of Minnesota React To The Trump Administration's Arrests Of Journalists Don Lemon And Georgia Fort. Explore Press Release.](#)